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Items for information and discussion: household surveys

Report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2017/228 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys. It provides a summary of the recent activities undertaken by the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys, including the mapping of global Sustainable Development Goal indicators and household surveys. The report contains a proposal for establishment of a trust fund for the implementation of various future activities of the Group. The Commission is invited to review the progress of work of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys and comment thereon and provide necessary guidance on (a) the proposed future areas of work; and (b) the proposal for establishment of the trust fund.

* E/CN.3/2018/1.



Report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys

I. Introduction

1. At its forty-sixth session, in 2015, the Statistical Commission, in decision 46/105,¹ endorsed the establishment of an Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys,¹ under the aegis of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, to foster the coordination and harmonization of household survey activities (see E/2015/24, chap. I, sect. C). In the same decision, the Commission also requested the development of the terms of reference of the Intersecretariat Working Group under the guidance of the Bureau of the Commission, to be presented to the Commission at its forty-seventh session. The list of current members of the Group are listed in the annex to the present report.

2. The terms of reference of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys were presented to the Statistical Commission at its forty-seventh session for information, through the report of the Secretary General on the Intersecretariat Working Group (E/CN.3/2016/21), which included the rationale, objectives and the mandate of the Group as well as its governance structure. The Commission took note of the report (see E/2016/24, chap. I, sect. B, decision 47/116).

3. The progress of work of the Intersecretariat Working Group since its establishment was set out in the report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.3/2017/20), which was submitted to the Statistical Commission at its forty-eighth session. A discussion of the broad contours of the work to be undertaken by the Group in the next two to three years was also included in that report.

4. The present report provides information on progress made by the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys since the submission of the report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.3/2017/20) to the Statistical Commission in 2017. This report also includes proposed future areas of work which are more cross-cutting in nature and identifies some specific outputs to be delivered by the Intersecretariat Working Group in the next two to three years. The Group recognizes that resources are needed to generate momentum in the context of its work and is therefore, striving to develop a proposal for the establishment of a trust fund, which will be outlined in a background document to be made available to the Commission in February 2018.

II. Progress of the work of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys since the report submitted to the Statistical Commission at its forty-eighth session

5. The Management Group of the Intersecretariat Working Group, at its third meeting, held on 27 September 2017, deliberated on two main issues, namely, the working procedure for smooth functioning of the Intersecretariat Working Group and resources needed for implementing its activities. The working procedures now under development include several elements related to the day-to-day functioning of the Intersecretariat Working Group, namely, selection of the Chair, meetings, establishment of task forces, clearance of outputs and criteria for inclusion of new

¹ Further information is available at the website of the Intersecretariat Working Group (<https://unstats.un.org/iswghs/>).

members. The Management Group also recognized the importance of injecting resources in support of some of the crucial activities of the Intersecretariat Working Group and discussed the initial funding proposal which was presented by the World Bank.

6. The Technical Working Group held its second meeting on 27 August 2017 and followed up with its first face-to-face meeting on 16 and 17 November 2017. These two meetings held in quick succession helped provide a new sense of direction to the future work of the Intersecretariat Working Group under the overall guidance and direction of the Management Group. It was decided to move away from sectoral issues and rally around activities that were more cross-cutting in nature. The Technical Working Group identified a few broad areas of cross-cutting activities to be undertaken in the next few years. The Group reviewed its recent work on the mapping of global Sustainable Development Goal indicators and household surveys and decided to develop a paper that would be used as a basis for developing a coordinated and integrated approach to the international programme of household surveys, underscoring the value of household surveys in the Sustainable Development Goals era. The Technical Working Group also agreed to align the funding proposal to strengthen the secretariat for day-to-day support of the work programme as well as fund future activities, particularly those are cross-cutting in nature.

7. Progress has been made in the work of the various task forces established under the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys. The two task forces that have made the most progress are the task force on education expenditure (led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics) and the task force on food consumption (led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)). The task force on education expenditure has already completed a report on the availability and reliability of education finance data in household surveys, published in May 2017, and is now working on a technical protocol for data processing. The task force led by FAO has completed its technical work and will transmit information thereon through the report of FAO on agricultural and rural statistics (E/CN.3/2018/13). The task force on labour statistics led by the International Labour Organization (ILO) aims at producing guidance to support countries using different types of surveys to measure labour input. Currently, ILO and the World Bank are conducting a joint pilot study in Sri Lanka to assess the impact of measurement of labour and labour underutilization in different types of surveys (the Labour Force Survey and the Living Standards Measurement Survey). Reporting on this process is expected by the end of 2018. The work of the task force on survey data documentation, led by the World Bank, which is in progress, is expected to be completed in 2018. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has already developed guidelines and a questionnaire on the measurement of corruption and bribery through household surveys in collaboration with the Centre of Excellence in Statistical Information on Government, Crime, Victimization and Justice,² the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and a few countries. It has also used a module on victimization surveys in some countries in Latin America and is currently working on a document demonstrating how to compute Sustainable Development Goal indicators based on a set of questions.

8. The Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys established a work stream in order to map the entire range of global Sustainable Development Goal

² Created in 2010 to initiate technical cooperation between UNODC and the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico.

indicators for which data could be derived from household surveys. The goal of such a mapping exercise was to develop a shared vision of how household survey-based data for Sustainable Development Goal indicators can be efficiently delivered by countries and, in a parallel attempt, to identify activities required by the agencies to support countries in this task. The exercise started with the development of a template for obtaining information from member agencies of the Intersecretariat Working Group on various aspects of the household surveys currently used or proposed for use in future to collect data on those indicators for which those members are the custodian agencies. The items of information which were included in the above-mentioned template are given below:

1. Goal
2. Target
3. Indicator
4. Tier
5. Custodian agency or agencies
6. Partner agency or agencies
7. Is data currently being collected through household surveys?
Yes (fully) Yes (partially) No

If Yes for item 7:

- (a) Typical household survey(s) used for collection
- (b) Any special sampling requirements. If Yes, describe
- (c) Population coverage needed
- (d) Proposed periodicity
- (e) Suitable for multi-topic survey (Yes/No)
- (f) Do standards exist on measurement? Yes/No (if Yes, provide link)
- (g) Does a standard questionnaire module exist? Yes/No (if Yes, provide link)

If No for item 7, are plans/work under way to collect data through household surveys (Yes/No). If Yes, describe the work on standard/guidance development undertaken

(8) Remarks (if any)

9. The information obtained through the above-mentioned template is currently being reviewed for final analysis on the current state of play with respect to measurement of the Sustainable Development Goal indicators through the household survey programmes of international agencies. The final analysis will be submitted in a background document to the Statistical Commission in February 2018. A preliminary analysis of the information shows that a total of 77 of the Sustainable Development Goal indicators can be sourced (either currently or on the basis of a proposal) from household surveys. This is spread widely across topics (13 of the 17 Goals are involved) but with the greatest concentration in the areas of health, education, gender equality, poverty, hunger, labour and justice, which points to the fact that a coordinated finite set of surveys offers the potential to deliver on a large proportion of the indicators. For example, close to two thirds of indicators could be produced at the desired frequency through a cycle of Demographic and Health

Surveys, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, Living Standards Measurement Surveys, Household Income Expenditure Surveys and Labour Force Surveys. Some additional indicators could possibly be covered by the same surveys. Further efficiency could be built into the system through a review of survey instruments with a view to identifying opportunities for coherence in variable specifications or modules where topics overlap. Such work has already been carried out among agencies and could be further expanded. Such a coordinated system has the potential to expand opportunities for capacity development in household surveys and could improve coherence across surveys and promote more cross-analysis. In addition to pointing to the possibility of efficiency gains in implementing a coordinated household survey system, the Sustainable Development Goals create some common cross-cutting challenges which can inform priority setting for cross-cutting work. Specifically, as all countries will face challenges associated with disaggregation and integration across sources, work on developing guidance and support in these areas can be of significant value.

10. The Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys is currently updating the inventory of household survey guidance and training materials that was submitted to the Statistical Commission in 2017 in a background document. This will help the Intersecretariat Working Group systematically review the available materials in order to identify commonalities and synergies as well as gaps so as to enable development of a strategy for training on theoretical and practical aspects of household surveys. The updated inventory will be submitted to the Commission in a background document in February 2018.

11. The Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys is preparing a proposal on the establishment of a trust fund to support the work of the Group and sustain its momentum through the implementation of its future activities. This proposal is expected to cover three components, namely, (a) technical coordination, (b) methodological validation and standard setting, and (c) country consultation and advocacy. For each component, a few sub-items activities have been identified for inclusion in the funding proposal, which will, to a large extent, be aligned to the cross-cutting activities identified by the Group. While the funding proposal would apply a longer-term perspective to the strategic direction, it would also include a more specific two-year funding request for clearly identified activities. A summary of the proposal for the establishment of the trust fund will be submitted to the Statistical Commission in a background document in February 2018.

III. Proposed future activities of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys

12. The Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys proposes to undertake the following activities, as grouped under broad areas of work in the medium term (see directly below). The success of the Intersecretariat Working Group in implementing these activities will be evaluated in terms of the number and quality of the outputs it delivers, which will hinge, to a large extent, on the ability of the Group to raise matching resources for the trust fund.

I. Technical coordination

- (a). Establish a technical secretariat for the Intersecretariat Working Group

(b) Coordinate the work of the Technical Working Group and the task forces and report thereon to the Management Group

(c) Foster methodological research and standard setting, focusing on cross-cutting issues, through the establishment of task forces and commissioning of work

(d) Lead in the publication of guidelines and best practices, following endorsement by the Statistics Division

2. Methodological validation and standard setting

(a) Develop a paper on a coordinated and integrated approach to an international programme of household surveys in countries, underscoring the value of household surveys in the era of the Sustainable Development Goals. The paper will be based on the ongoing work on mapping of Sustainable Development Goal indicators and household surveys

(b) Develop guidance, standards and protocols on topics related to household surveys through commissioned work, for example, on quality assurance functions, use of the computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI), sensitive topics in household surveys, questionnaire design and testing protocol, data disaggregation, data triangulation, the protocol for microdata sharing including geo-referenced data, a standard training curriculum and materials on household surveys

(c) Update the Statistics Division publication entitled *Designing Household Survey Samples: Practical Guidelines*,⁵ published in 2008

3. Country consultation and advocacy

(a) Coordinate the process for consultation with experts and countries on guidance, standards and protocols

(b) Support capacity-building

(c) Organize a panel on household surveys in Sustainable Development Goals monitoring at the UN World Data Forum in October 2018

(d) Organize an international conference on household surveys

IV. Points for discussion

13. The Statistical Commission is requested to comment and provide guidance on:

(a) The proposed future areas of work of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys;

(b) The proposal for the establishment of a trust fund for implementing work in the areas specified in the plan set out in section III above.

⁵ Series F, Studies in Methods, No. 98 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.XVII.13).

Annex**Membership of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys**

The members of the Intersecretariat Working Group include the following international organizations:

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
International Labour Organization
United Nations Children's Fund
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
Institute for Statistics
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
World Bank
World Health Organization
Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat

The Statistics Division serves as the secretariat of the Intersecretariat Working Group.